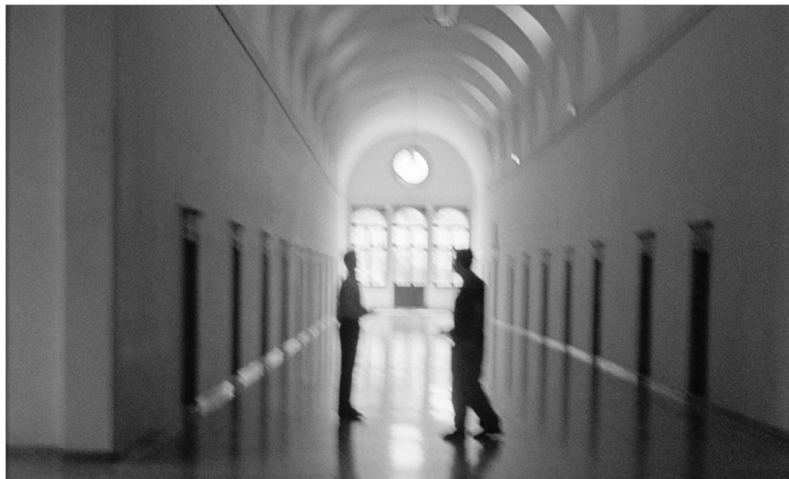


ARTS

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'In Memory of Me' presents a caricature of a Jesuit novice before the Second Vatican Council. It is an elegant place where no one seems to smile

A study of Jesuit life as torture

FILM REVIEW
In Memory of Me

U.CERT. 115 MINS

On an autumn day set in the present time a young man, Andrea (Christo Ivkov), arrives at a Jesuit novitiate to begin training for the priesthood. He does not seek the will of God or a life of service but an existential quest for self-discovery and the reason for being. He has led a successful life, fallen in love, tired of the world, and, not quite knowing why, has resumed attending Mass and rediscovered the Gospel. He moves into a world of asceticism, isolation, discipline and meditation. Loosely based on Furio Monicelli's novel *In Memory of Me* published in 1960, *In Memory of Me* traverses two worlds that will baffle many.

Staged in the Palladian magnificence of the island and monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice—a location so beautiful that it is worth seeing the film for that alone—the life he enters is far removed from present-day reality and only those familiar with Jesuit formation before the Second Vatican Council will recognise it. Yet nevertheless we find superiors, novices and brothers dressed in casual clothes using laptops—only the retired fathers wear cassocks. There is a state-of-the-art DVD player in the refectory and a smart unanswered telephone in the superior's office.

Square-leaded windows give tantalising glimpses of the contemporary life of the Venetian lagoon. No impression is given of the transformation in religious formation during the last 40 years and what is presented is a caricature of what existed before.

This is a joyless place of silence, study, suspicion, spying, intrigue, eavesdropping, self-obsession and tortured speculation. Acidulated spiritual conferences, icily given by the father superior (André Hennicke) and novice master (Marco Baliani)—mostly taken from the first week of Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*—extol immolation. In two hours there is only one smile (at the end) and no laughter. Instead, there are sidelong glances, long gazes, pensive expressions and immobile features. Insomniac nights are broken by stealthily, sometimes prying walks along sterile marble corridors and across box-bedded cloisters. There are whispered assignations contrived for painful revelations of doubt, resulting in dilution.

The scepticism of two novices, Fausto (Fausto Russo Alesi) and Zanna (Filippo Timi), inspire reservations in Andrea about his own vocation. They contrast the suppression of intellectual liberty and the absolute obedience to authority with Gospel imperatives. Andrea and Zanna become convinced that they have been shaped to believe in nothing other than a mound of formalities that echo the world in reverse in which the figure of Christ is equally deformed.

Zanna seeks freedom outside the order and is told by the superior that the heart's desire does not matter. Andrea is riven by further doubt, this time over whether to follow Zanna or to remain in search of "the terrifying mystery of serving a weak God". Saviero Costanzo, the director, has not made a documentary about Jesuit life, then or now, but loosely uses Monicelli's novel to examine existential themes and the contrast between religious faith, embodied in repression, and humanist emancipation.

No Jesuit novice in the world has ever been housed in such elegance

The homosexual subtext of Andrea's love for the angelic novice Lodovico, contrasted with his friendship with Zanna, is the theme of the novel, but in the film this is replaced by an abstract inquiry drained of human reality from which all affective emotions are eliminated. The inner life is represented by facial expression and silence in which meaning is conveyed by osmosis. Religious vocation, meanwhile, is depicted as pointless masochism. The fundamental motivation of the *Spiritual Exercises* is ultimately to put the Christian life into concrete, particular terms that lead to the discovery

of God in all things. In this claustrophobic atmosphere there is no evidence of community, no pastoral activity outside the novitiate walls, and no obvious preparation for a life of mission in the world. Instead of reading at meals, Strauss waltzes are inconspicuously played, and the light and shade of interior conflict is amplified by Tchaikovsky and Mahler. Zanna walks smilingly away from St Peter's dome to the Kyrie from the *Missa Luba*. All that is conveyed is introspective, heartless purposelessness in a setting of architectural magnificence. No Jesuit novice in the world has ever been housed in such elegance.

Artistically, Mario Baliani's photography makes a beautiful film and his subtle camera work conveys the unspoken word as strongly as the acting. Andrea Palladio evolved an architecture of light but the abbey church is invariably filmed at night and is given a brooding presence that embodies Costanzo's theme.

This study in cold and bloodless mental torture will probably be meaningless to a cosmopolitan British audience and will only appeal to a minority, but, if seminarians or novices are your preference, you will not be disappointed. Somehow, I suspect that *In Memory of Me* will not result in the same number of inquiries about Jesuit life that followed *The Mission*.

Anthony Symondson SJ

Beating pessimism with portraiture



ART REVIEW
Milo Andreas Wagner

Pop Art Portraits
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, UNTIL JAN 20

The Second World War ended well for America. Britain, however, was left bankrupt. By 1954, when rationing finally came to an end here, consumerism was no longer news in America. *Pop Art Portraits* begins by contrasting British optimism regarding the new culture with America's jaded sarcasm.

These differing attitudes are demonstrated, somewhat obviously, by hanging British and American art on opposite walls. The floor between them becomes analogous to the Atlantic, over which a rapprochement was later to develop in the 1960s. Further into the exhibition, British enthusiasm and American pessimism hang side by side, before finally conflating a gloomily ironic consensus.

Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg began the process of "straggling art back", from the wild abandon of abstract expressionism that had preceded them, to an art that again represented real things. Their stated aim was a noble one: to save art from itself. Abstract expressionism was seen as dangerously nihilistic. If it were allowed to go unchecked, there might be no return from its downward spiral of cynicism. One of the methods proposed to combat it was a reinvention of portraiture.

Most people are surprised to learn that Andy Warhol was a practising Catholic. But the placid disdain of his *Self Portrait* (1964) is a model of Renaissance serenity. Indeed, references to the Renaissance are everywhere in Pop Art: fantasy portraiture, invented by Giuseppe Arcimboldo in the 16th century, is central to the Pop project. Nods to it appear most evidently in Derek Boshier's work.

But preoccupations with sex also flavour many of the pieces on display. David Hockney's *My In The Mood For Love* is a tour de force of subversive homoeroticism. The sexualisation of women in the "girlie mags" and advertisements of the period provided a rich feeding ground for artists concerned with the interaction between person and product.

Another concept we are now very familiar with was just entering the mainstream: the fracture

between the persona of celebrity and the human life beneath it. This enquiry reached its tragic apex with Marilyn Monroe. No woman more completely represented the tensions of the age. There is a secular chapel of sorts at this exhibition, centred, predictably, on Warhol's silkscreen prints.

Richard Hamilton had already demonstrated the potential for dramatic irony with *My Marilyn*: at this point, Monroe is complicit in the process of manufacturing her persona.

But by the time we reach Warhol's prints, just two years later, there is nothing of Norma Jean left. Warhol's treatment of her is deeply unsettling, masking her in a succession of lurid washes that strip away any potential for rapport. As a commentary on what the idea of Marilyn Monroe had become, it was never bettered.

That said, Monroe as tragic heroine is a retroactive fantasy. She had no more trouble juggling her personal and professional life than Sinatra, or any other Hollywood star—documentaries shot at the time prove it.

But there are other, more serious problems with this exhibition. *Pop Art Portraits* credits Pop Art with the broadening of "portraiture", but at the same time shows us pictures only of people. Warhol's soup cans are the most significant and profound object portraits of the 20th century, but—inexplicably—they are absent.

Pop Art's own Roy Lichtenstein showed us that portraits didn't need to be about real people. *In The Car* depicts fictional characters in the artist's familiar comic book style. This was an explosive beginning for conceptual portraiture, establishing that the imaginary could be valid portrait material. But even Lichtenstein's work is still about people.

"Receiving wisdom," according to the National Portrait Gallery's literature, "tells us that Pop Art is about objects," but that Pop Art is about objects, and its great contribution to portraiture was to legitimise objects as subjects for portraiture. It is only because Marilyn Monroe became an object that she was good source material. Pop Art would not have looked at her twice simply as a human being; she was loved instead for what she represented. She was not a person; she was an idea—an icon, a signifier. In other words, an object.

How extraordinary it is that in celebrating Pop Art's contribution to portraiture, the curator, Paul Moorhouse, has completely overlooked its greatest achievement.

It almost doesn't matter: there are some monumentally important works of art here that more than justify the entry charge.

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THEATRE REVIEW
The Investigation
YOUNG VIC

More than six million Jews were murdered between the Nazis and the Holocaust. Peter Weiss's documentary play is based on the testimonies of victims from Auschwitz. The accused pretend ignorance of the atrocities, deny that they had anything to do with them, argue that the death figures are grossly exaggerated, and, when finally trapped that they were actively involved, always say that they were only obeying orders. Dorcy Rugamba's production is staged and acted with the utmost simplicity and dignity by a group of Rwandan actors in French. Their understatement is admirable, but there have been so many books, documentaries, films and plays about the Holocaust that, inevitably, they do not tell us anything that we do not already know. It would have been more interesting to have had a verbatim report from the victims of genocide in Rwanda.

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Swimming with Sharks
VADEVILLE THEATRE
The shark is a movie producer and, since he is in the business solely to make money, he produces trashy horror flicks. There is nothing subtle about either the character or Christian

Slick satire falls apart
THEATRE REVIEW
The Investigation
YOUNG VIC

Slater's swaggering bad guy performance, but it works. The play, adapted from George Huang's 1994 cult film, is slick and has lots of witty one-liners, and only goes to pieces after the interval when Hollywood satire becomes hysterical melodrama and the actors are at a loss how to act it. Matt Smith is very amusing as the naive dogsbody whom the mogul constantly humiliates.

Carlos Acosta
SADLER'S WELLS
It is not surprising that Carlos Acosta should want to celebrate his Cuban culture. The programme he has devised showcases guest artists of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba and the choreographer Alberto Mendez. Such is his drawing power these days that the show sold out the moment that booking opened. He offers a very slight and very short entertainment, which includes a lover's tiff, two dolls falling in love, an amorous encounter between the God of the River and the God of the Forest, a bit of slapstick, and the pas de deux from *Le Corsaire*. Marius Petipa's virtuosic choreography for virtuosos performers is worth the price of the ticket, if you have never seen it; and even if you have, especially when it is performed like it is here. Acosta, leaping at speed and at an impossible height, and Viengsay Valdes, holding an arabesque for what seems an eternity, are a knockout.

Robert Tanitch
Robert Tanitch's lavishly illustrated year-by-year chronicle London Stage in the 20th Century is published by Haus Publishing.

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